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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a history of early public schools in two Iowa townships. Townships are six by six mile areas of land that were established as the result of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The civil townships of Bennington and Cedar Falls were part of 17 townships located in Black Hawk County, Iowa. The Northwest Ordinance specified that the sale or income from a section in each township would be used by the state to build and support public schools. Additionally, an act of the Iowa Legislature in 1858 made each civil township a school district, ensuring that the tax unit for common schools was no smaller than a township. In Bennington and Cedar Falls Townships, nine subunits were created, each containing a school. Schools were usually started by a family or teacher and were private or subscription schools that required payment per child from the family to the village. In 1872, the Iowa General Assembly allowed a township to divide into nine rural independent districts, each having a three-member local board. After 1872, many townships voted to create independent districts that consisted of nine tax units instead of one. The number of school districts in Iowa increased rapidly in the next 4 years, until this authorization was withdrawn by the General Assembly in 1876. In the mid-1950s, due to low attendance and the passage of the School District Reorganization Law, most one-room schools became part of consolidated high school districts. Diagrams illustrate changes in school districts. (LP)

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EARLY SCHOOLS IN TWO TOWNSHIPS OF BLACK HAWK COUNTY, IOWA, USA

William H. Dreier

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EARLY SCHOOLS IN TWO TOWNSHIPS OF BLACK HAWK COUNTY, IOWA, USA

William H. Dreier

(Prepared for the Cedar Falls Historical Society. Selected parts were presented as "SCHOOLS IN CEDAR FALLS, B.C." for the ARCTURUS CLUB, Cedar Falls, IA, April 2, 1993.)

The township, as a six by six mile area of land, is distinct from the New England township. The New England village or town and all the lands around it farmed by those living in the village was sometimes called the "towne" or "Township". The township known west of the thirteen colonies, however, was a creation of the Continential Congress in its Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The plan for surveying the Northwest Territory of the United States identified land units which could be used to pay the soldiers of the Revolutionary War and was to result in the the creation of least three and not more than five new states. The idea came from Thomas Jefferson.

Years later, after Jefferson became president and the Louisianna Territory was purchased, the Northwest Ordinance continued there and was a pattern for rest of the land in the new mainland USA Territories. The area was surveyed, townships numbered, counties organized, and then states establish as the population living on the land increased.

The federal government created a land office in Dubuque by an Act of Congress in 1833. This office carried out the selling of the land west of it known as the Black Hawk Territory. In following the Ordinance of 1787 the survey marked off six-mile wide "townships" numbered north of longitude lines from the equator as zero base, and six mile "ranges" of latitude lines numbered west of the 0 degrees latitude of Greenwich.

The Dubuque Land Office identified and received payment for land it sold and verified its exact location, using the rows and tiers system. These "Tiers" or townships of six miles were numbered north of a base line running east and west just south of the Arkansas/Missouri border. The "Ranges" of six miles were numbered west of a base latitude line running north and south near the edge of western Illinois, known as the 5th meridan.

The land within each of the ranges and tiers was a township, an area of 6 miles by 6 miles. Each mile was marked by points. Each square mile area, 36 in a township, was a "section", or 640 acres of land. As the land was resold into smaller units the sections were halved and quartered. The Quarter Section of 160 acres, given the Revolutionary and other War veterans, was a large area of land. These often were sold in half quarters by land agents to settlers seeking a family farm.

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The townships were grouped together, usually sixteen, to form a "County". These were created by the territory or state govenment as soon as the land settlement resulted in a population of farmers, villages, and towns needing its own local administration. The records of the first sales of the land was kept in Dubuque. That office required proof of the all the sales. Government gifts of land to railroads, land purchased by speculators and land sold to settlers were noted and mapped.

These sales and exchanges of land were recorded in the Dubuque Federal Land office until a "Recorders Office" was established in the more local county seat. The County Seat was that town selected by the vote of the people in the county to be the center for the recording of the sale of land and its official exchange. Identification of these sales, in sections, quarter sections or half of one quarter (80 acres) was noted for the public by the County Recorder at the County Seat town.

I. Creation of Black Hawk County

The Dubuque Land Office as soon as it opened in 1833 offered land for sale in the Black Hawk Territory. This included the Cedar River just below Turkey Foot, the spot where two other streams joined the Cedar. These forks were known by the native Americas as a gathering place, by trappers for its beavers and furs, by loggers who had taken much of the giant red cedar trees down the river, and by the early explorers. Indian trails were well established to the Turkey Foot.

It was early in 1845 that the first settlers, William Sturgess and E. D. Adams, came to the Cedar River below the Turkey Foot. A mill was established and the settlement was called Sturgess Falls. In that summer another family came to a spot further south on the Cedar River known as "Prairie Crossing". It was on July 4th of 1845 that Mrs. George Hanna is to have said to her husband and to brother John Melrose, "This is the place".

These first settlers located in Township 89 North and Range 13 West. In 1850 Sturgess applied for a Post Office for the settlement to be known as Cedar Falls. Baldwin in his "Crossroads on the Cedar" reports the boundries of Black Hawk County had been set out by the Iowa legislature of 1843 and had been attached to Buchanan County for judical and tax purposes.

Baldwin stated Hanna purchased additional land and began plotting Waterloo in 1852. The state granted a petition to establish local government in Black Hawk County in 1853.

In 1854 Allen C. Fuller entered a part of section 36 of township 90 and range 12, this was about 10 miles northeast of Cedar Falls. Fuller never became a resident and by 1855 nearly all of the land in that 36 square mile area had been entered into the land office books. The first settler in this township was in 1856. The township first was part of township 90 and range 11, known as Lester Township. Homer's 1909 history of the area reports it was ordered that Township 90 range 12 separate from Lester and be known as Bennington Township in 1858 .

The residents within the 16 townships of Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Lester, Bennington, and other townships not named, wanted to vote for the county seat town. The town of Waterloo favored the creation of a commission which would study and make a report. This was voted and approved by the legislature. To the surprise of Waterloo the commission awarded the court house to Cedar Falls. Couty government was established in Cedar Falls. Waterloo was nearer the center of the 16 townships and there are stories of raids to take the records to that place. In 1855 the Legislature voted, after another petition, that a popular county vote would be held to choose between Cedar Falls and Waterloo for the Court House. That vote was 388 for Waterloo and 260 for Cedar Falls. This decision was accepted but did not end the arguments and questions.

A 1877 plat map of Black Hawk County names all of the 17 civil townships. Seven of the civil townships were smaller or larger than the standard 36 quare miles, each was located on one side or the other of the Cedar River. A total of 17 civil townships were created from the 16 surveyed. The history of the early public schools of two townships (Bennington and Cedar Falls) is the topic for this paper.

II. Early Schools in Bennington Township

The Northwest Ordinance had specified that the sale or income from section 16 in each township would be used by the state to support schools. This was a significant contribution to each new state. First to support the concept of public education and second to designate income from land for a common school unit. This law designated that 1/36th or 2.8 percent of the wealth (land property) of the township as it was sold or rented would be paid to the state to be used for school expenses.

An act of the Iowa Legislature in 1858 made each civil township a school district. Earlier some townships had created local school districts of

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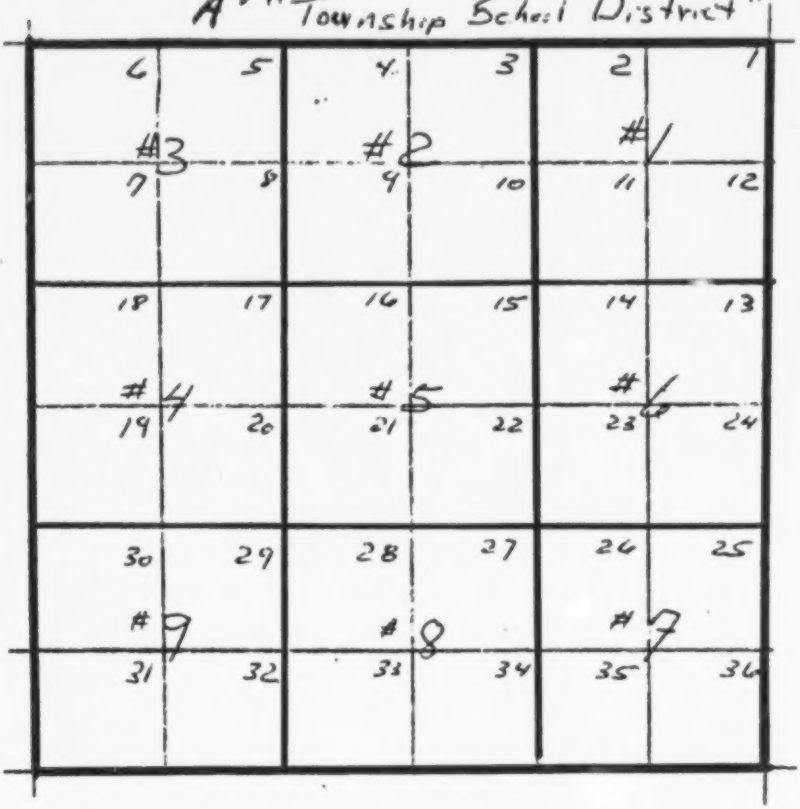
Table Number 1.

Bennington Township, Black Hawk County
A "Township School District"



The 9 school areas, each 2 miles by 2 miles, are shown and numbered.

Township 90 North Range 12 West of the 5th Prime Meridian

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less than six miles by six miles in size. This act affirmed that the tax unit for common schools was no smaller than a township.

Soon after Bennington Township was organized it had created four subunits for schools, each with 9 sections. School houses had been built. However it was found this area was too large for a common school. The township then increased the number of subunits from four to nine, putting a school in each four sections. Bennington township moved the first four school houses and build more. With nine schools in a township any settler's (owner or renter) children had no more than two miles to travel to a school.

Homer reports the 1858 population of the township was 180 of whom 26 were school children between the ages of 5 and 21 years of age. At that time settlers were located on 11 of the 36 sections. Schools at first, no doubt, were established only in areas of the township needing them.

Bennington township, Baldwin reports, soon after it was organized (1858) presemted a petition to the County Court asking that all section lines be designated as public roads so that all land owners could reach their property. It was a good many years before useable roads were available to all. This action seems to have stopped the use of earlier Indian trails or routes by westword settlers for roads that were in any way diagonal.Some section lines became known as "Schoolhouse Road" because a township school would be found every two miles

A 1875 plat map of Black Hawk County shows 9 schools in Bennington Township. This basic pattern for the township school district continued for the next 75 years. Early in the 1920's the southeast corner school closed as that area became part of the Dunkerton Consolidated School District located in the town a few miles east. Change came to the other schools as population declined and schools were closed. The finale for the district, the buildings, and the schools came in the decade of the 1950's. The Iowa Community School District law of 1953 required that all common school districts offer both elementary and secondary lever education. The early one room schools closed and their elementary pupils were relocated to larger buildings. See Table Number 1.

III. Early Schools in Cedar Falls Township

The earliest schools in the County were private or subscription schools. One of these in Cedar Falls township area is reported in Messerly's account of "The Turkey Foot".

The Turkey Foot was on the Cedar River about five or six miles north of the 1845 Sturgis settlement. In 1846 James Newell and family were the first to settle in the Turkey Foot area. The first school of that area was held in Newell's cabin during the winter of 1850-51 taught by William Dean. The first school building was established in 1852.

This school building is marked as #2 in Washington Township on a 1875 Plat Map of Black Hawk County. Schoolhouse #1 is two miles south and about 3.5 miles north of Cedar Falls.

The pattern in Cedar Falls Township and much of the midwest was for the earliest schools to be started by a family or teacher. They were private or subscription schools. This changed when the Seventh General Assembly passed "An Act for public schools for the state of Iowa" on March 29th, 1858, making the civil township the school district in place of smaller units.

Earlier as settlements grew and schools for all the people were desired a common school would be established in that place. It was first supported by subscription (payment per child required from the family) paid to the village. An early law in Iowa, 1846, had permitted the creation of a "Town Independent District". This allowed a town to vote that it would support a public common school. The town's limits would be subtracted from the rest of the township. This left the remaining rural area of the township to support and control its schools as the town supported and controled its schools (often including a high school).

This paper concerns these early schools in the Cedar Falls Township area and will not directly report on the Cedar Falls Independent School District. A Cedar Falls Township Plat Map of 1875 shows 7 school buildings. An area equal to a section or more is blacked out for the Town Independent District of Cedar Falls.

Beyond the southwest corner of the city limits is the Orphan's Home, east of it is a school building and east of it is "The Fairgrounds". From other sources they can be identified as the Iowa Civil War Orphan's Home at Cedar Falls (in 1876 becoming the Iowa State Normal School). Next was Cedar Falls Township School District Number 5 and then the Cedar Valley Fairgrounds.

After Iowa had provided for the creation of the Town Independent School Districts there was much pressure from local rural neighborhoods to create their own "Independent" units free of the Township. Some of these had been actually created but the School township Law of 1858 eliminated these. The Township School District was the only unit for the common schools in the rural areas. However in 1872 the Iowa General Assembly voted to allowed a Towship, upon request, to divide into nine Rural Independent Districts.

The Rural Independent District had a three member local board, chosen from the four square mile area. They had the control and support, property tax-wise, of its own common school. With the affermation of the Township system all the common school districts had been under the supervision of an elected County Superintendent of Schools since 1846.

A Township District usually had nine board members, one selected from each subunit, and its support was a property tax of the whole township divided among the nine schools. After 1872 many townships voted to create Independent districts, usually nine tax units in place of one.The number of school districts in Iowa increased rapidly. The authorization to create the Rural Independent District lasted four years and was withdrawn by the General Assembly in 1876.

A change in Cedar Falls Township is reflected in a decision of a Township school. Hart states that in 1883 the Board of the Normal School received a proposition from the Board of Directors of Rural Independent School District Number 5. That Principal Gilchrist was approached by District # 5 indicates that earlier the Township School District had decided to create its separate Rural Independent units. School # 1 had vanished from the Township with the earlier creation of the Cedar Falls Independent School, leaving 8 other four-square mile subunits. These had each become Rural Independent Districts.

Number 5 was located just south of the Cedar Falls City limits and near the Normal School. Hart reports the # 5 board would transfer its pupils and certain funds under their control "for the organization and maintenance of a Model School Deptment under the supervision of the Principal of the Iowa State Normal School." This was authorized and the tuition for the pupils was fixed at 20¢ per week, paid by District #5 in place of the cost of a teacher. The building became the Model School with a teacher hired by Principal Gilchrist.

In December, 1885. the ISNS Board agreed that "no pupils outside of District # 5 should be permitted to attend the Model School without the approval of the Board of Directors of said district". When the teacher, Miss Lillian Barlett, resigned in the spring of 1886 Hart states "it was the end of the Model School at Cedar Falls". During the years that followed the Directors of # 5 resumed operation of its school.

In March, 1892, the Directors approached Principal Seerly, in his fourth year at ISNS, and offered to pay the sum of $550 a year "toward the expenses of a Model School on the condition that the children of the District be admitted and be used in forming such a School". Again the offer of #5 was accepted. Principal Seerley hired Alice C. King as the teacher for the "Training School" of ISNS.

The Normal School in 1892 abandoned its Boarding Bepartment resulting in the need building of rooming houses on College Hill which was in the northern part of District Number 5. Two years later the people voted to increase the Cedar Falls city limits south to the east-west road on which Schoolhouse #5 was located. With the extension of the city limits the Normal School made agreements with the City Independent District and the remainding area of District #5 for pupils. By 1894 110 pupils were enrolled from #5 and the payment increased from $550 to $650 per year from #5.

As Iowa State Normal School grew it prepared a place on campus for the "Model School" and then for the "Training School". ISNS changed to the Iowa State Teachers College and its area increased. Soon the campus and Cedar Falls City limits extended beyond 27th street. The college and/or the city included all the area of the Rural Independent District #5. Schoolhouses remained in the seven other township districts.

The 1896 Plat Map of Black Hawk County located the rural schools andalso gave each a number. Bennington Township's system of numbering was the system used by the Township systems throughout the nation. Following the numbering of the sections of the township, school # 1 was in the northeast corner and the numbers continued west, #2 and #3, then dropped south two miles for #4, then moved east for #5 and #6, then dropped south again for two miles and the southeast corner was #7, west to #8 and finally #9 was in the southwest corner of the township.

The Cedar Falls Township schools were located on a 1875 map. On the 1896 map they were also numbered. The numbers, however, were not in the regular order, went up to ten, and some numbers were missing. Reasoning suggests that the Rural Independent Districts went back to the number given them in the order they were built by the township.

School #1, in northeast, was built in the early settlement of Cedar Falls. The building and number disappeared as the town limits included it as part of the Town Independent District. School # 2 was five and a half miles west. On the 1875 map it was in a small settlement. School #3 is missing but could also have been located in Cedar Falls.

School #4 is 3½ miles south of Cedar Falls, School #5 became part of the Normal School and of the Cedar Falls town district. School #6 was two miles west of Cedar Falls, School #7 was four miles west, #8 was in the southwest corner of the township. School #9 was two miles east of #6, and School #10, the last built, was in the center of the township.

Documented information on this numbering system for the building is not know. The schools are identified by their number and space and also named in a 1910 Plat Map of the Township. The name of #2 is Benson, #4 is Maplegrove, #6 is Eddy, #7 is not named, #8 is Greeley, #9 is Brookside, and #10 is Center. From 1910 to the decade of the 50's these names and numbers were used to identify these Rural Independent Districts in Cedar Falls Township. See Table Number 2.

The last part of this paper will briefly report on changes in these schools and their districts in the 20th Century.

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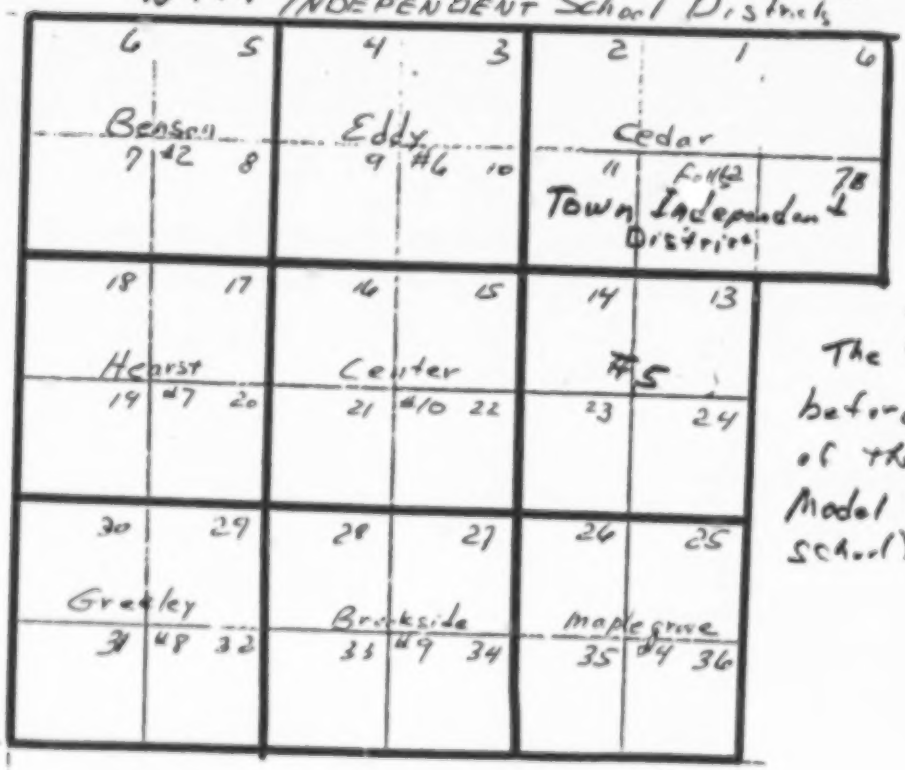
Table Number 2.

Cedar Falls Township, Black Hawk County

With "INDEPENDENT School Districts"



The 9 school districts before #5 became part of the ISNS (later ISTC) Model School (later Training school) program in 1883.

Township 89 North - Range 14 West of the 5th Prime Meridian

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V. Change and End of the One Room Schools

Plat maps of the County, reports, and oral history have been used to follow the Township Schools in the 20th Century. This report is very general but will give some ideas about the schools and their governance.

In Bennington Township the schools remained under the direction of a Township School Board until the middle of the 1950's. The only change came in the second decade of the 1900's when the Dunkerton Consolidated School was formed. The southeast subunit, or school #7, became part of the new Consolidated District.

Macy Campbell in 1922 mentions the Dunkerton Consolidated School among a partial list of districts transporting children by motor busses. He also reports the school tax in the Bennington Towship District was 19 mills per $1,000 of asessed evaluation of the land in those remaining 32 section. The school property tax in 1922 was not given for Dunkerton but it was 37 mills in Hudson, and 40 mills in the Orange Township Consolidated District, compared with 60 mills in the town of Cedar Falls and 83 mills in the city of Waterloo (all in Black Hawk County).

Farm families became smaller and the number of acres farmed by a family became larger with each of the decades of the 20th Century. The attendance in many one-room schools dropped to 12 then 4 and 0. The preparation of the teacher increased from no high school to high school, to some college, to two or more years of college. The teacher's pay increased as did all supplies. At the same time the nearby town consolidated school districts were givem permission to use their busses to pick up students who had graduated from the common school and desired to attend their high school. The tuition cost of these secondary students was also part of the education paid by the property tax payers of the one-room school districts.

In time the directors in the Township as well as in the Rural Independent Districts began to tuition the elementary pupils as well. It was more economical for the district and an educational advantage for the student for the district not to hire a teacher or run a school. The district collected property tax and state school aid to pay for the tuition of the pupils (which included the bussing) to a nearby Consolidated or the Town Independent School District. The rural schools closed, no one met in them, the buildings were empty. Since the Districts remainded the schools remained on their own section corners of the Township Maps. They are on the plat maps in sample years of 1926 and 1939. The 1946 map omits the #2 school. School # 7 had disappeared when it went into the Consolidated District.

It was the 1953 School District Reorganization Law creating the new Community Schol Districts that brought changes. It required that all land in the state become a part part of a high school district. The

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Bennington Township T90N-R12W

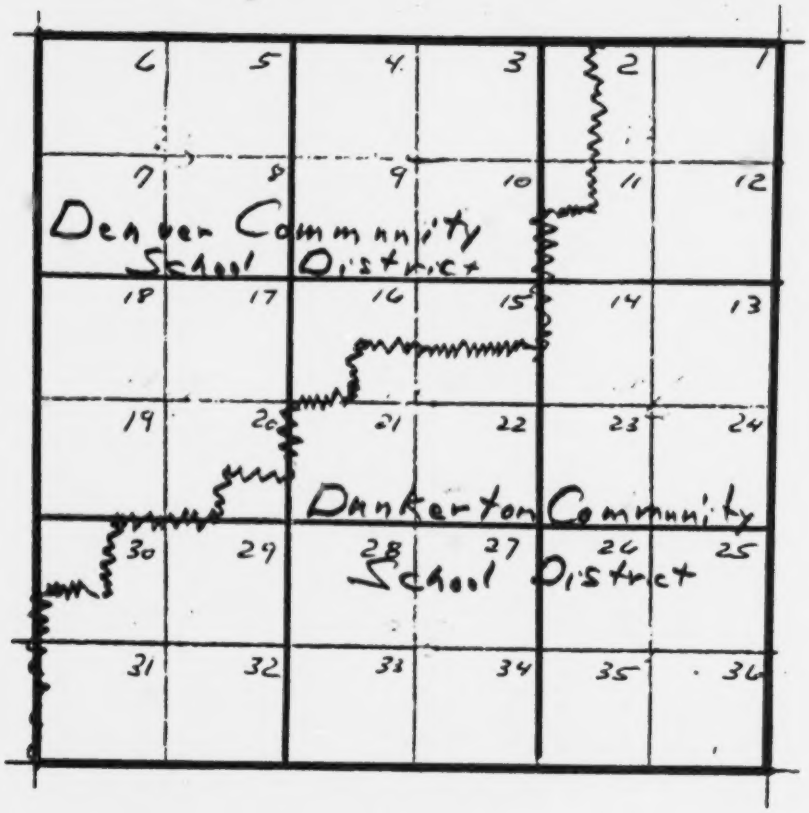
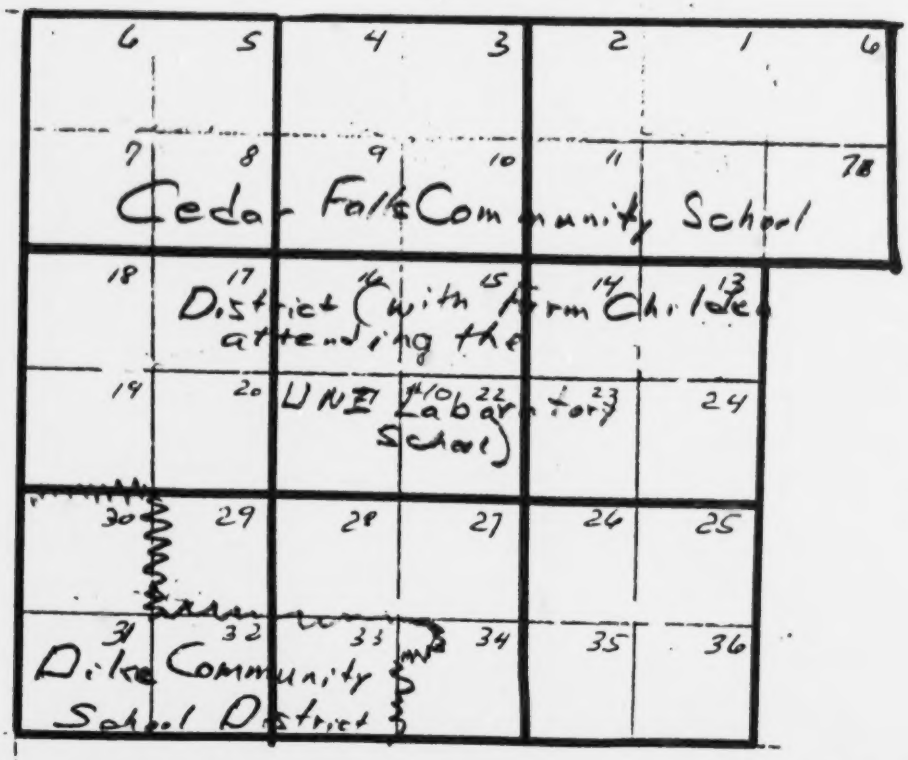


Table Number 3.

Diversion of School Districts in Two Townships (After the 1953 Iowa Law Requiring All Land Be a Part of a High School District) in 1958

Cedar Falls Township T89N-R14W


6 5 4 3 2 1 6
7 8 9 10 11 18
Cedar Falls Community School
18 17 16 15 14 13
District (with Farm Children attending the UNI Laboratory School)
19 20 21 22 23 24
30 29 28 27 26 25
31 32 33 34 35 36
Dike Community School District

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parents, farmers, land owners, villages were asked by this law to decide what nearby high school district they would join.

In the decade of the 1950's the few one-room shools that were "keeping school" closed and the pupils went to the newly formed Community School District. Those districts not keeping school but paying tuition for their pupils (elementary and secondary) also chose a new district. In the same way the districts who were without any students or budgets and had no school property tax also made the choice of becoming part of a K - 12 grade Community School District. The joined district educated both elementary and secondary pupils and its property tax applied to all the property value of villages, towns, and sections of farm land in the larger new Community School District.

After World War II the Bennington Township School District was paying tuition to high school districts on its east and west. In time as decisions were made a southwest/northeast line was created following the section and quarter section corners across the township. Land owners, farmers, renters all looked closely at the map to see where their children and property tax dollars for schools would go. By the end of the 1950 decade the area of School #1 went east to Dunkerton as did #5, #6, #7 (already there) #8 and # 9. The northwest corner subunits of Schools #2, #3, and #4 went west to the Denver Community School district. See Table Number 3.

In time the school yard with its empty building was turned over to the land owners of the corner of the section where it had been build. Sometimes the building was sold by the District but more often the land owner received the building to use, sell, or leave alone, as wished. This ended the Bennington Township School District which had existed from the 1850's to the 1950's.

Two of the school buildings empty and dead since 1945 continue to have life in this last decade of the 20th Century. Sometime in the 1970's the Cedar Falls Education Association decided to move and restore the Center School building, #5. It was purchased and moved to the Black Hawk County Conservatin Park just north of Cedar Falls as a historical place. The restored school was of interest to its former teachers, those who had been one-room school pupils, to school children, to students of Iowa History, to citizens of all ages, and to teachers-in-preparation from the University of Northern Iowa and other institutions.

The restored #5 school was painted red and opened for visitors with a call to the Black Hawk County Conservation Board office near the entrance of the park and the school. Late in the 1980's the Questors Club of Cedar Falls became interested in this piece of history and proposed to work with the Cedar Falls Historical Society to move the building to a more populated spot, as part of the historical buildings of the Society. This arrangement came about and in the 1990's the

'R Little Red Schoolhouse, with its history as Bennington #5 or Center School, has been visited by 1,000 each year at its site on 1st Street in Cedar Falls not far from the Ice House Museum.

School #6 was a gift to the National Cattle Congress by Mrs. Velma Magee in memory of her husband L. J.(Joe) Magee. The #6 school appears on the southeast quarter of Section 13, in the Bennington Township plat maps of 1947 and of 1939 with he name of L. J. Magee. The name of M. J. Magee is on that quarter section on township maps of 1926 and 1910. It is known that this #6 building was the second one build at that place. The first was built in 1882, and this #6 was build in 1914 and used until 1945. The building was moved in 1981 and restored by former teachers, friends, and citizens of Bennington Township. Now again gleaming white School #6 proudly stands on a corner of the National Cattle Congress grounds where children and former one-room school students visit, toll it bell, and look at the many mementoes of the school's earlier days.

The leaders in the Rural Independent Districts of Cedar Falls Township were stimulated by their neighbor, the Normal School and then the Iowa State Teachers College, and had influenced it as well. School #5 had been the first to seek help from the Normal School.

The Normal School and the Teachers College had leaders who desired to extend help beyond their local township. President Seerley, Hart reports, assisted in arranging a meeting in October, 1913, of 341 rural teachers and county superintendents from 10 counties. At this campus meeting President Seerley announced for the first time that ISTC would work to establish "study centers" to extend the teaching resources to one-room schools around northeast Iowa.

In 1915 Macy Campbell organized the Department of Rural Education. In the next decade the College affiliated with schools in nine rural indepent districts, three township districts, and two consolidated school districts.

The seven districts in nearby Cedar Falls township had teachers and schools working with ISTC in different ways in the years which followed. In 1950 the Benson School and the Greeley School were among the regular student teaching sites for ISTC. In that year a college class visited not only these two but the Eddy School (sometimes also called the Batchelor School) and the Brookside School as well as one-room schools in other townships near the ISTC campus.

By 1950 the Maplegrove and Central School had closed. School #7, sometime referred to as the Hearst School, had also closed. All of the districts, the four "keeping school" and the three closed had decissions to make when the Iowa 1953 School District Reorganization Law went into affect. Most of their high school students went to the ISTC Laboratory School, some to the high school in the Cedar Falls Independent District. A few in the southwest corner went to the Dike Consolidated School District High School.

Before the decade of the 50's was over each of the districts had decided to join the Cedar Falls Community School with arrangements for the farm children to continue with the ISTC Laboratory School for grades K to 12 as long as the family desired. In the Greeley School, however, the west side of the district joined the Dike Community School District. The seven rural independent district arranged for thier school yards to go to the owners of the portion of section of their location. The buildings were left to finally decay in the open grave of its school playground. See Table Number 3.

But, two one-room schools still live and receive children, teachers, and guests in Cedar Falls Township. School #5 in Bennington Township had been moved and restored and is 'R Little Red School on 1st Street in Cedar Falls. On the ISTC campus, now the University of Northern Iowa, sits a small white wooden building, Marshall Center School built in 1898, moved to UNI from Marshall Township, Pocahantas County, in 1989. It represent all the one room schools which had received teachers from the campus of Iowa State Normal School and Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls between 1876 and 1956.

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